Who Led Selma?

Local roots and national partners in a voting rights campaign

SS24.AS.16a "Describe how civil rights campaigns in Alabama were led by a coalition of local, grassroots organizations and national civil rights leaders and organizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions by local people or groups, circle actions by national leaders or groups, and number two places where their work connected.

The Many Hands Behind Selma

(1) In Selma, Alabama, Black residents faced tests and intimidation when they tried to register to vote. The Dallas County Voters League, a local group led by people including Amelia Boynton Robinson, pushed for voting rights despite those risks. Members held meetings, helped neighbors prepare to register, and kept pressing officials. Organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, worked alongside local residents before the large marches of 1965. The campaign grew from years of local work.

(2) In early 1965, the local voters league invited the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, or SCLC, to join the campaign. Martin Luther King Jr. and other SCLC leaders brought experience organizing large nonviolent protests and drew national news coverage. Local churches offered places for meetings, while Selma residents continued to risk arrest when they sought to register. SNCC organizers also took part, though they did not always agree with SCLC about tactics. No single leader or organization could claim the whole effort.

(3) After a voting rights march began on March 7, 1965, state troopers attacked marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Television footage brought national attention to the violence. Local activists, SNCC members, and SCLC leaders kept demanding federal protection for voting rights. Later that month, thousands joined a march from Selma to Montgomery. In August, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which targeted barriers to voting. The campaign linked local persistence with national organizing and public pressure.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the voters league and SNCC build the campaign before the large marches?

2. What did SCLC add to the work Selma residents had already begun?

3. How did local churches and national organizers support the campaign in different ways?

4. After the bridge attack, how did local and national activists keep pressing for change?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label titled “Beyond One Leader” explaining why the Selma campaign needed both local and national groups. Name one local group and one national group, and include two actions from different stages of the campaign.

Who Led Selma?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions by local people or groups, circle actions by national leaders or groups, and number two places where their work connected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the voters league and SNCC build the campaign before the large marches?	**The voters league held meetings and helped neighbors prepare to register. SNCC organizers worked alongside local residents.**
2	What did SCLC add to the work Selma residents had already begun?	**SCLC brought experience organizing large nonviolent protests and drew national news coverage.**
3	How did local churches and national organizers support the campaign in different ways?	**Local churches provided meeting places. National organizers helped organize protests and attract attention.**
4	After the bridge attack, how did local and national activists keep pressing for change?	**Local activists, SNCC members, and SCLC leaders continued demanding federal protection for voting rights, and thousands joined a march to Montgomery.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Beyond One Leader: The Dallas County Voters League pressed for voting rights while Black residents faced intimidation when they tried to register. Before the large marches, SNCC organizers worked with local residents. In 1965, the league invited SCLC, whose leaders helped organize protests and drew national news coverage. After troopers attacked marchers, local activists and national groups kept demanding federal protection. Selma's campaign was not one person's work: local persistence and national organizing carried it forward.

Accept other accurate examples from the passage. Look for an explanation of how local and national contributions connected, not just a list of names.